

Slavery in the South-Asian Subcontinent

Extracted from

NATIVE LIFE IN TRAVANCORE

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THANDA PULAVAN.

CHAPTER XXIX

SLAVERY

Slavery in Malabar doubtless took its rise historically from the conquest of the aboriginal inhabitants by invaders and settlers from the north. Several strata of population are easily discoverable — the earliest composed of the lowest castes, and, perhaps, also the hill tribes — next the Dravidians, who now form the mass of the respectable Hindu population — and over all, the Aryan Brahmans, few in number, but clever, intelligent, and possessed of great religious and social authority.

For thousands of years these lowest castes have continued in a state of hereditary servitude and abject poverty, exposed to the caprice or brutality of the owner, and disposable according to his pleasure; too abhorrent, at the same time, on account of caste pollution, to be touched or closely approached by their superiors, or to be admitted to any of the privileges or amenities

of religion. Every wealthy man, and even individuals of inferior castes, had a number of bondsmen born in slavery. Syrian Christians also possessed slaves.

The number of persons originally reduced to a state of slavery was increased by the sale of children in times of famine and distress, which has occurred even in our own day. Other additions have been made from time to time by petty princes carrying away captives in their wars, by the fraud or violence of kidnappers, as a judgment on criminals, as a punishment on females of the higher classes who have fallen, and are cast out to associate with the lowest of the population. Muhammadans and Roman Catholics of property, also purchased slaves in order to proselytise them to their own religion.

On account of the law of caste pollution, these slaves have all been engaged solely in predial or field work, not domestic service, as they could not enter the houses of their masters, nor be used for personal attendance : even in the fields their work must be

superintended from a certain distance. The unhappy influence of Hindu caste was thus added to the usual evils of slavery. With reference to this double infliction a writer in the Asiatic Review says:

“The condition of the predial or rustic slaves of Malabar cannot bear a favourable comparison with that of household or domestic slaves among the Mahommedans. The latter are received with them into a fraternity; and are no longer kept at a suspicious distance. In Arabia their treatment is said to be like that of children, and they go by the appellation of sons with their masters. They often rise to the most confidential station in the family; and the external appearance of the master and slave is hardly distinguishable, they are so much upon a par.”

The proportion of the population formerly held in slavery may easily be gathered from the Census Report for 1875, which gives the Pallars, Pariahs, and Pulayars, “soil-slaves” now freed, at 258,401 out of 2,311,379, being

11.2 per cent, of the total population. But other classes should be added, who were in a very similar condition, as the Kuravars, some 56,000 in number, and the Vedars and Ulladans, who are designated in the Memoir of Travancore, as “the least domesticated of the predial slaves;” so that we may fairly state that one-eighth of the entire population were sunk in outright and acknowledged slavery of the worst kind; while about a fourth of the population, besides, were regarded as decidedly polluting in caste, and were to nearly as great an extent as the soil slaves deprived of the rights and enjoyments of freemen and citizens. These servile classes may, therefore, be put down as constituting over one-third of the entire population.

We have already seen that the rajahs sold into slavery felons and criminals liable to capital punishment, in which case the penalty, if justly imposed, might be compared to ours of transportation beyond the seas. This ostracism was also reserved for female criminals, on

whom the punishment of death is never inflicted.

Another source of the supply of slaves consisted of high-caste females exposed to this punishment when detected in immorality or breach of caste rules. As there are many unmarried women amongst the Namburi Brahmans some amount of temptation and evil necessarily springs up, notwithstanding severe restrictions and the care exercised. Now-a-days there is a better resort open to such — to join the Syrian or Roman Catholic Church, or the Muhammadans — which is sometimes done in the northern districts. Recently, the illegitimate child of a Brahman woman was given away to a Nair woman. According to Day, a Brahman woman erring with a low-caste man became the Rajah's slave : a low-caste woman allowing improper intimacy with a Brahman was sold to the Muhammadans. Pacha Mattathu says that the women of the "Eight Knights" who were extirpated in M.E 908, were handed over to fishermen, a hard enough fate for ladies of rank

and authority. Barbosa describes Nayar females as sold in this way when not put to death by relatives for their fault. “If any woman of Nayar family should offend against the law of her sect, and the King know of it before her relations and brothers, he commands her to be taken and sold out of the kingdom to Moors or Christians, And if her male relations or sons know, of it first, they shut her up and kill her with dagger or spear wounds, saying that if they did not do so they would remain greatly dishonoured.”

A curious custom also existed, which is said to have added to the number of the enslaved. The various castes met at fighting grounds at Pallam, Ochira, &c.; and at this season it was supposed that low-caste men were at liberty to seize high-caste women if they could manage it, and to retain them. Perhaps this practice took its origin in some kind of faction fights. A certain woman at Mundakayam, with fair Syrian features, is said to have been carried off thus. Hence arose a popular error that during the months of Kumbha and Meena (February and

March), if a Pulayan meets a Sudra woman alone he may seize her, Unless she is accompanied by a Shanar boy. This time of year was called Pula pidi kalam, Gundert says that this time of terror was in “the month Karkadam (15th July to 15th August), during which high caste women may lose caste if a slave happen to throw a stone at them after sunset.” So the slave owners had their own troubles to bear from this institution.

The Pariahs in North Travancore formerly kidnapped females of high caste, whom they were said to treat afterwards in a brutal manner.

Their custom was to turn robbers in the month of February, just after the ingathering of the harvest, when they were free from field work, and at the same time excited by demon worship, dancing, and drink. They broke into the houses of Brahmans and Nayars, carrying away their children and property, in excuse for which they pretended motives of revenge rather than interest, urging a tradition that they were once a division of the Brahmans, but entrapped into a

breach of caste rules by their enemies making them eat beef. These crimes were once committed almost with impunity in some parts, but have now disappeared. Once having lost caste, even by no fault of their own, restoration to home and friends is impossible to Hindus.

Barbosa, writing about A.D. 1516, refers to this strange custom as practised by the polcas (Pulayars). “These low people during certain months of the year try as hard as they can to touch some of the Nayr women, as best they may be able to manage it, and secretly by night, to do them harm. So they go by night amongst the houses of the Nayrs to touch women; and these take many precautions against this injury during this season. And if they touch any woman, even though no one see it, and though there should be no witnesses, she, the Nayr woman herself, publishes it immediately, crying out, and leaves her house without choosing to enter it again to damage her lineage. And what she most thinks of doing is to run to the house of some low people to hide herself, that her

relations may not kill her as a remedy for what has happened, or sell her to some strangers, as they are accustomed to do.”

Somewhat hard this upon feeble and helpless women, who should have been protected, if necessary, from such risks by their husbands and other male relatives, who had themselves virtually invented and created the imaginary crime, yet strictly carried out the retribution for it !

In times of famine also, parents sold their children for the sake of sustenance to any one who appeared able to support them. During the famine of 1860 in South Travancore, Mr. Cox wrote : — “The people are selling their own children, and this for a mere trifle. I hesitate to mention the lowest sum I have heard, but for a quarter of a rupee, and less, they sell their children into slavery to the Muhammadans and others on the seacoast; and these have the means of disposing of them again so as to make much profit — of course they make converts of them at once. The poor starving

parents, instead of seeing their children dying with hunger which they are unable to appease, know or hope that they have something to live upon. How deeply we should pity them in this extremity of misery !”.

A century ago a similar practice was described by Forbes. “The number of poor people who come down to Anjengo and the other seaports, from the inland country during a famine, either to sell themselves or to dispose of their children as slaves, is astonishing. During my residence at Anjengo there was no famine, nor any unnatural scarcity of rain, but during the rainy season many were weekly brought down from the mountains to be sold on the coast. They did not appear to think it so great a hardship as we imagine. I must and do think the feelings of a Malabar peasant and those of a cottage family in England are very different: the former certainly part with their children apparently with very little compunction; the latter are united with every tender sympathetic tie.”

These various circumstances would naturally lead to trading in slaves, in which the early Europeans themselves set an evil example by importing Kafir and Mozambique slaves. Barbosa mentions the trade : — “If it should happen any year not to rain, Chormendel falls into such a state of famine that many die of it, and some sell their own children for a few provisions, or for two or three fanams (say sixpence). And in these times the Malabars carry rice and cocoanuts to them, and return with their ships laden with slaves.”

Bartolomeo also speaks of the trade in “Cafre slaves from the coast of Africa.” Reference to the same subject is made in the Asiatic Review for 1828. Mr. Baber heard of the traffic in children, even of good castes, from Travancore into Malabar, especially, strange to say, - by a European planter. Pulayars and others were purchased at Alleppey; and some free children of good caste were also secured, and cruelly compelled to eat with these, so that they lost caste as well as freedom. Colonel Munro

reproved this misconduct, and the Muhammadan agent in effecting the purchases, was punished by the native court in Travancore for his crime.

Colonel Munro had also discovered, in 1812, a number of half-starved and naked natives in irons as slaves at the Dutch settlement at Chunganicherry. The proprietor was a Pondicherry man, and the inhabitants of Chunganicherry persisted in the traffic in slaves in defiance of the proclamation of Government.

It was remarked on the above circumstances that “where the severe Mussulman Government most prevailed, the condition of the slave was the easiest; while his condition is the most abject in those countries where the ancient institutions of the Hindus have been least disturbed, where the public demand on the soil is most light, and private property in the land is universal and of the highest value.”

Even in later days instances of traffic in slaves have occurred. The Muhammadans

found in large towns are ever ready to prey upon orphans and enslave them. Complaints are still made of slaves being taken from Northern India to Persia; and a Mussulman has quite recently been convicted of importing girls as slaves for Bhopal, and detaining them in Bombay against their will. Some years ago, the Rev. H. Baker rescued a family of heathen Shinars from the hands of Muhammadan merchants, who would have carried them to Zanzibar, by paying Rs. 21 as their price. They had been sold by their parents; and after their rescue were educated and employed in various capacities. One girl of whom he knew was actually taken away to Zanzibar by a Muhammadan, who secured her in Travancore ostensibly as a wife, then sold her off in Zanzibar. Her release and return to her native country were procured by Dr. Kirk.

In Trichur a friend of mine was present in the mission-house in 1872, when some Nayar landholders came and actually carried off a woman and child who had put themselves

under instruction for baptism. The missionary started off to prevent the kidnapper, and overtook him on the public road. The man was punished by the Cochin Sirkar. Shortly after, some Brahmans made a similar attempt, and the court sentenced the culprit to six months' imprisonment; but as the offender was of the "twice-born" caste, intercession was made by the authorities for his forgiveness by the missionary, which was agreed to, on condition that a proclamation should be issued to the effect that no one could hereafter have or hold, buy or sell any person, under penalties, the highest of which was seven years' imprisonment. This valuable document the missionary had printed for circulation. Only the other day, also, a bride was kidnapped on the way to Mundakayam by a strong party.

As to the classes of soil slaves, the lowest were the Pulayars, whose customs and condition are described in a previous chapter. Information respecting their deplorable condition

in North Travancore before emancipation is given in the Church Mission Record (or 1850: —

“The condition of these unhappy beings is, I think, without a parallel in the whole range of history. They are so wretchedly provided with the necessaries of life that the most loathsome things are a treat to them. They are bought and sold like cattle, and are often worse treated. The owners had formerly power to flog them and enchain them, and in some cases to maim them, and even to deprive them of their lives. They are everywhere paid for labour at the lowest possible rate consistent with keeping life. They are valued differently in different places. The price of an able-bodied slave in the low country, where their wages are comparatively high, is not more than six rupees. In Mallapally it comes to nearly 18 rupees; and in places nearer the hills it rises considerably higher, even to double the last amount. The children of slaves do not belong to the father’s master, but are the property of the mother’s owner. In some places, however, the father is allowed a right to

one child, which, of course, is the property of his master. This succession is by the female line, in accordance with the custom of the Nayers, the principal slaveholders of the country.

“A great landlord in a village near Mallapally has nearly 200 of them daily employed on his farm, while three times that number are let out on rent to inferior farmers. The slaves are chiefly composed of two races — the Pariahs and the Puliahs— of whom the latter form the more numerous class.”

Further interesting details are supplied in the same periodical for February, 1854, in the form, of questions and answers, as follows : —

“Why do you not learn? “

“We have no time — must attend to work by day, and watch at night, — but our children teach us some prayers and lessons.”

“What are your wages ?”

“Three-quarters of an edungaly of paddy for adults over fifteen years of age, men and women alike.”

“What are the wages of slaves in other districts ?”

“Half an edungaly, with a trifling present once a year at Onam.”

“In sickness, is relief given by the masters ?”

“At first a little medicine, but this is soon discontinued. No food is supplied.”

“What is your usual food ? “

“Besides rice when able to work, often only the leaves of a plant called tagara (Cassia tora) boiled; and for six months the roots of wild yams are dug from the jungle.”

“How do you get salt?”

“We exchange one-sixth of our daily wages in paddy for a day’s supply of salt”

“And for tobacco ? “

“We give the same quantity for tobacco.”

“How do you do for extra expenses as weddings, &c. ? “

“We borrow, and re-pay at harvest time, when we get extra gleanings.”

“Are slaves sold and transferred to other countries, or to distant districts?”

“Four days ago we saw a man and woman and two children brought for sale.”

“In your neighbourhood, are wives and children separated from the father by these sales?”

“This sometimes occurs — the Wattacherry Syrian Christian family have four slave women, who had been married, but were compelled to separate from their husbands and to take others chosen for them by their masters.”

“Are slave children brought for sale?”

“About six months ago two children were brought and sold to T. Narayanan : the

relatives afterwards came to take them away, but the master would not suffer it.”

“Are slaves sometimes chained and beaten?”

“Not now chained, but sometimes beaten and disabled for work for months.”

“In old age when disabled for work what support is given?”

“No pension or support of any kind.”

“How are children paid?”

“Not having proper food, the children are weak and unable to do hard work, therefore they are not paid any wages until they are fifteen years of age; they are not even allowed to attend the mission school, **if their masters can hinder it.**”

Rev. J. Abbs also, in 1841, described the condition of the Pulayars in the South from personal observation, and as reported to him by “a rich Soodra, who possesses a number of slaves.” He informed me that the highest price

for which a slave could be sold was sixty fanams (Rs. 8). He says that he is at liberty to let or transfer his servants as he pleases — to separate the children from the parents, and the wife from the husband — to give them as presents to his friends, or allot them as the wedding dowry of his daughters — to assign them over as a payment for his debts — and in short, as he expressed it, to him they are “as cattle.” Many fell victims to fever, rheumatism, and other diseases; and very few lived to old age. They were but poorly fed, and scantily clothed, and were notorious for drunkenness, dishonesty, and evil passions.

“We cannot calculate,” adds Mr. Abbs, “how many of the sons of bondage are prematurely removed from this world in childhood and youth, for want of sufficient nourishment and clothing. Those who reach maturity are doomed to work like beasts of burden, to live in wretched hovels, to eat the most offensive animals and reptiles, and to be treated as outcasts by their fellow creatures. Their evidence is not admitted

against their masters; and if they meet a free person on the road they are bound to run from him lest they pollute him. They draw out a miserable existence; and are often left in old age to beg for their support, or to perish with hunger. By few are they comforted, pitied or relieved; none seek to remove their distresses; and no man cares for their souls.”

The Pallars are very similar in condition to the Pulayars, and though properly a Tamil caste, their designation is so like that of the Pulayars that they regard themselves as a branch of that caste. Next come the Pariahs, respecting whom in North Travancore further quotations from the same source will be appreciated : —

“The carcasses of all domestic animals are claimed by the Pariahs as belonging to them by right. They frequently poison cows, and otherwise kill them, for the sake of their flesh. Lying, stealing, and drunkenness are the prevailing vices of the different tribes of slaves; but crimes of an aggravated nature

are very rare among them, except the Pariahs, who are frequently chargeable with robbery, burglary, kidnapping, murder, and other heinous crimes. Nowhere is the degradation of this caste so complete as in this country.”(Church Mission Record 1850.)

The Kuravars, Vedars, and others, were many of them attached to the fields, and in circumstances quite similar to those of the other slave castes.

Other castes also appear to have retained some of their own number in a state of serfdom or semi-slavery. Amongst Shanars the Kalla, or “Pseudo” Shanars were slaves of wealthy Shanars, to whose descendants this fact is scarcely yet forgiven or forgotten; and the miserable prejudice against them not yet quite abandoned. Of the great tribe of Ilavars, the Valanmar are still, through forced services, virtually in the condition of slaves belonging to the State.

The attention of the British Government was first attracted to the Cherumars or Pulayar slaves in Malabar; and various inquiries were instituted into their condition. In 1838, the Census gave the number of slaves in that province as 144,371; and in 1843 slavery was entirely abolished.

Early in 1847 a petition on the subject was signed by thirteen missionaries labouring in Travancore, in which they showed from the Census of 1836 that the soil slaves there numbered 164,864. Official reports were also forwarded, in which the slaves were described as “in the lowest possible state of degradation.” Not only were they held by private persons, but some were the property of the Government, which derived a small revenue from letting out their services to such cultivators as required them. The British Resident pressed upon the Dewan the manumission of the children of these slaves; in addition to which, the home authorities suggested the emancipation of the parents also; and the subject of predial slavery

generally, with a view to its entire abolition at an early period, was recommended to special attention.

In consequence of this pressure a proclamation was issued in 1853 (30th Cunny M.E 1029), declaring free the children of slaves of the State who may be subsequently born; forbidding the seizure of private slaves in satisfaction of debts; recognising the right of slaves to possess property and to enjoy the protection of the law; directing the emancipation of slaves connected with property escheating to the State; prohibiting, without consent, the sale and separation to a greater distance than fifteen miles of slave parents and children; and prescribing regulations intended to preserve that unhappy class from oppression. “How far,” remarks Thornton, “these rules will be effective against the opposition of both prince and people remains to be seen; but it is something to have obtained a recognition of the right of slaves to be dealt with as human beings.” (“Gazetteer,” Art. Travancore.)

This measure having been found, as was anticipated in such a state of society, utterly inoperative to any practical result, another Proclamation was, by the influence of the Madras Government, issued in June, 1855 (12th Mithunam M.E. 1030), as follows : —

“Whereas we are anxious to better the condition of our slave population; and it is but just that they should have conceded to them those advantages which are enjoyed by the same class of subjects in the extensive territories of the Hon. E. I. Company; and whereas it appears that our Proclamation of the 6th Coombhum 1029 has not fully accomplished that object, we therefore deem it right to rescind the same, and to proclaim : —

1st. That from and after the date of this Proclamation, all those who are included in the denomination of Sirkar slaves shall be considered free, as well as their posterity, the tax hitherto leviable on them being hereby abolished.

2nd. That no Public Officer shall, in execution of any decree or order of Court, or for the enforcement of any demand of Rent or Revenue, sell or cause to be sold any person, or the right to the compulsory labour or services of any person, on the ground that such person is in a state of slavery.

“3rd. That no rights arising out of an alleged property in the person or services of any individual as a slave, shall be enforced by any Civil or Criminal Court, or Magistrate, within this territory.

“4th. That no person who may have acquired property by his own industry, or by the exercise of any art, calling, or profession, or by inheritance, assignment, gift, or bequest, shall be dispossessed of such property, or prevented from taking possession thereof on the ground that such person, or that the person from whom the property may have been derived, was a slave.

“5th. That any act which would be a penal offence, if done to a free man, shall be equally an offence if done to any person on the pretext of his being in a condition of slavery.”

This was followed by another royal Proclamation in August 1858, as follows: — “To all Police Officers. Whereas in some Districts the low-caste people are put to great inconvenience because they cannot approach the places where the Tahsildars sit, to represent their grievances, the Tahsildars shall therefore hear their complaints every day in such places as the low-castes also can approach to prefer their petitions, and shall decide such petitions without delay.”

This again was followed by a Circular Order in the next month : — “To all Police Officers. Whereas it is reported that since slavery has been abolished by Royal Proclamation, some persons do not allow those who were formerly slaves to work for whom they chose; and also that these persons, with the view of bringing back those who have gone to work under

others, use intimidation and prefer false accusations of theft, &c. against them, and thereby trouble and oppress them; and whereas, it is also reported that such persons are helped by Sirkar officials, the Samprathies are hereby ordered to inform the Police Gumasthas, Tanah Naicks, Provertykars, and others, that the Royal Proclamation must be strictly carried out, and that those who in opposition to it persecute these people with false charges shall be duly punished; and all Sirkar officers who are abettors to such complainants shall be at once dismissed the service. The Tahsildars also shall give the matter special attention; and for the future, inquiries shall be made without unnecessary delay into the truth of charges brought against the low-castes, such as Pulayans, Pariahs, and Coravans, &c.; inquiries shall also be made to ascertain in whose employ they are; and should it be found that the charge is true and should be accepted, or on the other hand that it is false,

they shall file, investigate, and decide according to law and in obedience to this Circular Order.”

These measures were variously carried out by officials, but by most with little zest. As remarked in Admin. Report for M.E.1038, “Cruel treatment of predial slaves by their masters has been attempted to be repressed by committing the latter to the Courts, whenever the charges against them were brought to notice, and sufficiently established. Those servants, who belong to a very low and ignorant class, are gradually awakening to a sense of their liberty to take employment under any master they like, as is evident by certain complaints of the landlords. It must, however, be feared that a proportion of cases of illtreatment are never brought to the notice of authority; and also that they are not, in some places, sought out by the local officials with the requisite degree of zeal. But it should not be overlooked that time is required to counteract the prejudices and traditions of centuries.”

A few, like Sir Madava Row, nobly and honourably supported the cause of right; but cases of complaint rarely succeeded in those days, as the subordinate magistracy were so deeply prejudiced and naturally partial to their own intimates and caste connections.

The former slave-owners grudged, as they still do, the emancipation of the serfs, fearing the ruin of their agricultural interests; and sought to hinder freedom and keep the Pulayars down in every possible way. They laboured to prevent the slaves getting lands, reclaimed by themselves, registered in their own names as private property, and appropriated adjacent gardens actually cleared by them. They terrified their serfs by absurd and wicked reports, especially from coming under Christian influence and enlightenment. And they resisted their access to Courts of Justice, Government schools, public markets, and high roads. Slaveholders have ever kept their slaves as much as possible from schools and education.

The liberated slaves also have been, as a body, slow to avail themselves of their freedom, and in many instances remain in their former condition. This is not without its advantages. A sudden revolution in the social condition of such multitudes is not desirable — especially as other Hindus are unwilling to educate them — or a complete upturning of the arrangements of society, but fair, steady progress and gradual development as the times improve, and as diligence, moral character, and natural ability develop themselves. With the spread of civilisation and education, and an increased demand for labour, these classes are able to procure somewhat better terms from their employers, or are falling in with other employments and other masters, and society is slowly coming somewhat nearer to a healthy state.

The Pulayars and Pariahs who have been Christianized are being educated by the Missionary Societies, towards the secular instruction supplied by whom grants-in-aid are

made by the Sirkar, rather than admit these low-castes into their schools. They begin, especially in South Travancore, to dress decently, to use the public roads, enter the markets, and acquire private property.

Their present condition varies in different parts of the country. In the South, where Protestant Christian congregations are numerous, their condition is improving. In the far North, distant from the capital, from civilisation, and from the observation of Europeans, their circumstances have been but slightly ameliorated. Dewan Sashiah Sastri gave it as his opinion that “Though slavery has been abolished, it is doubtful whether it has tended to improve the condition of the serf classes very materially; freed from oppression on the one hand, they have lost to some extent the paternal care and protection they used to receive from their masters.”

No satisfaction is expressed here with the emancipation of the slaves, nor is expression given to any hope as to their improvement in the

future. But the testimony of influential and able officials who exhibit a practical interest in the social advancement of the people is to the effect that the slave-castes are rising by degrees, “acquiring in some cases by their own labour independent property in land, an advantage long denied them, first by open opposition and subsequently by intrigues on the part of the high castes.” Still, ‘no doubt, the present condition of the great mass, especially in North Travancore, is fairly represented by a wellinformed writer in the Travancore Diocesan Gazette (Apl. 1882) as follows : —

“These proclamations and advancing civilisation doubtless have made a marked improvement in their favour; and yet one has only to make a slight inquiry to find that, even in the present day, their condition is most wretched and pitiable, and that in some important points these edicts are a dead letter. We are assured that in many parts in the eastern districts of Travancore slavery practically exists, and that many are unaware of

their emancipation. However this may be, and we are not disposed to doubt the testimony on this point, the condition of those in the large western villages or towns in North Travancore is bad enough.

In some places they are not allowed on the public roads; in others, they are driven from them to seek shelter in the jungle on the approach of a high-caste man; hence it is most difficult for them to travel from place to place. Should they be engaged in work in or near the roads, they are compelled to place leaves as a mark to warn the high-caste of their presence, who, on seeing it, shout for them to retire while they pass. They may not approach within 64 feet of a high-caste man.

They are still not allowed to enter any public markets, and hence stand at great disadvantage in selling any little produce they may happen to possess; and consequently are kept in a state of poverty. They are not permitted to build their houses near the public roads; nor are they, as a rule, allowed to avail

themselves of the Sirkar ferry-boats to cross swollen rivers.

They are not allowed to enter a shop, but should they wish to purchase articles, they must lay down their money at some distance from the shop, shout out their wants, and retire while the owner comes forth, takes up the money, and places instead the articles required. As a rule, though nominally allowed to possess property, they possess none. Should they clear a little waste land, their rich masters generally get the land registered in their own names, and thus they are deprived of the fruit of their industry.

We have used the phrase “not allowed” throughout, for we can find no written laws by which such privileges are forbidden them. But this state of things arises from the fact, not that the Government makes decrees for their oppression, but that it does not adequately protect them; or, as is stated in the last proclamation, that its officers and servants in very many cases do not interfere to protect them, but even connive at their oppression. Can

any one suppose, for instance, that if Government officials set their faces against Pulayars being driven from the public roads, or protected them in their endeavours to enter the public markets, or allowed them to approach close to the Law Courts, that this state of things would continue? **Would it not soon cease under British rule ?**

Such a state of things is revolting to the instincts of humanity, repugnant to the feelings of all civilized men, and that it should be winked at under a civilized Government is surprising. May we not hope that under a new and enlightened Rajah such a state of things may soon be abolished, and all men feel that they have a right to the paternal protection of government while they faithfully observe its laws — nay, that the more helpless they are themselves, the more right they have to it.”

The continued existence up to a few years ago of the practice of buying and selling slaves in some of the northern districts, where there are almost no schools, and where the slaves

are still scarcely informed of the fact of their legal emancipation, as it has never officially been made known to them, was admitted in the Administration Report for M.E. 1045.

“It is here that the practice of buying and selling the right of servitude still prevails. But it is clandestinely carried on; and the buyer and seller are well aware that the right parted with, or acquired, cannot be enforced by law. Legally the transaction is quite invalid..... The fetters have been broken, but the emancipated labourer, from attachment, habit, or helplessness, chooses to continue where he was..... European Missionaries have been instrumental in gradually awakening the liberated bondman to a sense of freedom and self-reliance.”

The causes which operate to hinder the rise of these classes are clearly and ably set forth in the following remarks of Rev. C. Yesudian, a native missionary of lengthened experience. He says : “The following considerations, humanly speaking, may be given as reasons

for the failure of these classes to avail themselves more largely of the blessed opportunity offered to them by Christianity for the promotion of their temporal and eternal interests : —

1st. The length of servitude under which they have groaned from time immemorial has so much crippled them that they are too weak to stand on their own feet without a crutch. Hence they look for support and protection to their old masters, on whose premises or farms they can pick up, honestly or dishonestly, what they want for a livelihood.

2nd. Christianity advises its minister to urge upon his hearers the necessity of giving for the support of the ministry.

3rd. The poor slaves were to the Sudra landholders what the damsel of Philippi was to her masters. Finding the hope of their gains is gone, they are highly incensed at the emancipation from slavery as the result of the introduction of the Gospel among them, and try

their utmost by enticements or by persecution to retain them in their former condition.

By way of enticement, they hold out promises of increased wages. They pretend to sympathize with them in straits by loans and small presents, or let them hold bits of paddy land, occasionally supplying them with seed, plough, and bullocks. They secretly persuade their friends to raise up lawsuits against the slaves, and soon after stand as mediators to effect a compromise.

When the slaves see through these stratagems, and this pretended kindness, they are persecuted in various ways, such as —

1st Their rented lands are taken from them.

2nd. They are deprived of their hire, in part or wholly, whenever they have to do Sirkar work. On the occasion of any high official passing through the country, these poor people are forced to give, without payment, such things as fowls, eggs, milk, straw, &c., which they can hardly spare without great

inconvenience and distress. Should they refuse to part with their property, they are beaten, taken to the local officers as disloyal, and shut up in the Tanna (prison).

3rd. The hamlets of these people lying in the midst of paddy fields without village roads, they have to drive their cattle or carry their dead along the narrow ridges of rice fields, and are falsely complained against for damage to cultivation or crop, and heavily fined.

4th. Bond deeds are also forged against them, and got proved as genuine before courts, where decisions are sometimes passed, requiring them to pay what they never owed, though the persecutors at length offer to forgive the debt on condition of their returning to their former servitude. They are thus intimidated. Some may be surprised to know that this state of things prevails in Travancore, which at present enjoys the privilege of being under a mild government; but it must be borne in mind that as these people are the most obscure portion of the community, simple and

mouthless, they are unable to defend themselves and their rights against the violence of their masters, who, forming the ruling class in the district, and occupying one of the remotest recesses of the country, can, to a great extent, commit acts of injustice with impunity.”

A particular instance of fraud, which occurred a few years ago, may be mentioned. “A Pariah got a piece of jungle as mortgage from a Sudra, cleared and planted the land, so that it became worth about a hundred rupees. Then the Sudra called the man and told him to bring his document, along with sixty fanams, for which, he assured him, he should get the land registered in the man’s name. The Sudra afterwards produced a new document, assuring the Pariah (who could not read) that it was the proper deed, and he received it with pleasure. But soon afterwards, the land he had cleared was registered in another person’s name, and taken from the poor man, who was unable to obtain any redress. The Sudras in these parts,

being connected with the police clerks, can get anything they like done against these poor people, who are easily cheated and oppressed.”

Again, an agricultural labourer borrows a sum of money from a landowner, and gives his service and the service of his children to pay the interest. He lives all his lifetime with his wife and children giving service under these conditions; and so generations pass, and the principal can never be repaid. The landowner of course feeds them, as it is to his interest to keep them in health. This system extends, more or less, all over the country, but it specially holds in the more distant and hilly districts.

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